

POETICS OF MATERIALITY: IT IS AND IT IS NOT

ZAHRA HOSSEINKHAN

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Abstract

There have been a number of philosophical theories that relate to the study of materiality and the role of the art object as an extension of ontology leading to self-awareness. These studies have investigated how art functions through its materiality. My research focuses on the engaging potentiality of the material experience of work of art and material agency within the artistic process, in which it entangles the artist, the space, and the audience in a web of connections. It is through the experiment of materiality that I, as the artist am able to diminish or blur binary oppositional boundaries and to show the interrelation between physical and non-physical¹ material. It is through my material experimentation that I establish a fundamental relationship between myself as the artist, the viewer, the space and the work of art/object, as it originates from binary oppositional experiences in all form of its manifestations. Hence in this research, materiality extends beyond physical matter and broadly encompasses all relevant information related to the work of art, such as the material, the process, production date and origin, its history and condition, the artist's personal history as it pertains to the provenance of the work and workplace. As well, the research encompasses all physical/non-physical, material/immaterial and visible/invisible involvement in the process and production of the artwork. The material as an agent reveals itself through both physical appearance and artistic process and communicates infinite possibilities through its potentiality.

Considerations of materiality can be seen in the works of artists. Anish Kapoor and Shirazeh Houshiari, both experiment with a phenomenological approach in understanding

¹ Non-Physical – A Definition: In ontology and the philosophy of mind, a **non-physical entity** refers to being that exists outside physical reality.

materiality and how it leads them to self-awareness. My research will pinpoint some aspects of their practice similar or different from the work I am presenting. The study of materiality in this research is an extension of ontology and a step towards self-awareness and will take the shape of installation artworks that are experienced through the potentiality of material, creating experience through material stimulation.

My thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 discusses the background and historical context within which this research was initiated. It will talk about my childhood experiences and memories that have had strong impact on her art practice today. Chapter 2 will give the conceptual and theoretical background of this research. Chapter 3 will talk about the relation between the theories and my artworks. Chapter 4 will give a brief account of the development of some of the artworks. It will describe the artwork in detail, and its relation to the theoretical concept informing this research. Chapter 5 summarizes the project and draws some conclusions about how my practice is an extension of ontology leading to self-awareness. The final chapter provides images of the work.

Dedication

To Dr. Hassan Ghaffari. Thank you for standing by me throughout these two years. I appreciate your help and support for making this world a better place to live through a better educational achievement.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Section A: *My childhood experiences*

Fall is the rainy season in Tehran, making the city poetic and the art galleries welcoming to visitors. Coming from an artistic family, I often visited more exhibitions during this season. My father was an architect, and my mother's hobby was poetry and music. This meant I was raised in an artistic environment. At the same time, I have a diverse family background. I am of mixed origin, of Muslim, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Sufism descent. My father was a wealthy man, a Shia Muslim architect and developer. His hobby was to make sculptures and to sing. My mother comes from a mix of Jewish, Zoroastrian and Sufism religious background, and has a particular interest in and talent for poetry, music, and singing.

I grew up watching my father make unique sculptures from unusual architectural materials. He would build a fish castle for his extraordinarily large aquarium. I remember the fish moving through the castle, while lights inside it created shades and patterns through its coloured windows. This always drew my attention to the magic of light reflection. Also, I remember my father often took me to places where art of the highest quality could be seen. This was to encourage my interest in art. For this reason, the spectacular architectural palaces Golestan and Sadabad Palaces, built by the Pahlavi dynasty, hold special significance for me, since we regularly visited them. He also used to take me to his building sites and show me his architectural designs for different projects. I grew up seeing him draw architectural plans (these always involved geometric shapes). I was always attracted to the overall geometric shapes and forms of these architectural designs, and the magnificent palaces. Most fascinating to me were the extravagant decorative geometrical patterns, and the way natural and artificial light was employed in these architectural designs through mirror pieces. They have ever since stayed with

me as an experience, to the extent that I developed a taste for materials that could reflect notions of nobility and extravagance.

The Royal Palaces — such as Kakh Golestan and Kakh Sadabad near north Tehran — are all significant places I have visited with my father. The reflection of light in small mirrored pieces, delicately covering the massive walls and roofs, created a sense of vast and monumental spaces. The sun shining through windows, or light from massive chandeliers, would reflect on the mirror fragments creating a dazzling space. The materials had the ability to make different feelings and experiences in the audience. One could feel its' magical impact. To me, it was indeed a sublime experience. I remember I was momentarily paralyzed by the majestic and sublime effect of the magnificent materiality of these palaces. I was always left with a great emotion and strong sense of awe.

Later, I immigrated to Canada along with my parents. This also added to the diversity of my cultural background. I soon learned about Canadian culture and I became a mix of influences from Western and Eastern cultures. This meant that I grew up with a feeling of adaptability yet with complexity at its core. This feeling reflected the way in which I negotiated a sense of self between contrasting cultural categories. I existed in a floating category, one in which my concept of self shifted back and forth between designations, never fully in one camp or the other, and never harmoniously between. This fluctuating sense of identity compounded my feelings of unsettledness and uncertainty produced by my multi-faceted cultural background . I carried this jumble of influences in my life and found myself repeatedly in a state of complexity and restlessness.

The interesting part is that I continuously found myself relating to specific material things based on the cultural diversity of my family background. One example, is the experience

of going to different cultural sites with my father and my mother and looking at Persian architectural features and the mirrored works meant to create a bright and highly shining atmosphere through consecutive reflections of light; another was visiting the Fire Temples of Zoroastrians or Jewish synagogues in Tehran. Each would have an interesting impact, yet I noticed the use of gold in all of these places.

These childhood experiences became a point of departure for my art practice. Coming to terms with my background for me, as a first step, meant developing my art practice while studying in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia. I wanted to investigate the relationship between materiality and socio-culture constructs as they related to my experience. For example, how would a specific material represent culture and identity? At that time, taking a minimalist approach, I started to incorporate the architectural, industrial materials familiar from my childhood. At the same time, ” in my study of hybrid identity through material investigation, I was intrigued by Homi Bhabha, a leading figure in cultural studies, and his theoretical concept of a “third space culture. As he describes it, a new hybrid identity emerges from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and colonized². The hybrid is a blend of the indigenous, homeland people, culture and the imposed colonial culture. The result of this dynamic cultural amalgamation is the birth of “third space (hybrid)” identity.

Influenced by ‘third space’ culture theory of Homi Bhabha, I started looking into how objects/things represent time and history, and socio-political and cultural constructs. I needed to demonstrate how an object can make a connection to my hybrid identity. For this, mirrors became the main material I used in this stage of my art practice. I was interested to see if mirrors could reflect my first space, time, history, and culture. In the Persian context, the use of mirrors

² Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

in architectural motifs and the color gold have associations to the divine. In Persian belief, God is considered the light of the heavens and earth; the beauty of God is seen and reflected in the mirror. The Persian belief is that, through mirrors, the divine can be realized and studied. In the mirror, the beauty of the sun is reflected, expressing the majesty and greatness of God. The manifestation of numerical and geometrical metaphors in architecture expresses theosophical, mystical and philosophical concepts in Persian culture. Similarly, in the Jewish synagogues, gold is the symbol of the divine or celestial light, the glory of God. For this, many palaces were decorated with mirrors to reflect and create the majestic power of Kings and Queens and to suggest supremacy, nobility and exclusion. Hence, mirrors link past and present, and show history and socio-cultural elements reflecting Persian cultural identity.

Coming from a Persian background and researching more about my Persian cultural identity, I learned that Persia is one of the world's oldest civilizations with a history that goes back to 7000 BC and is intertwined with the history of larger regions. Persia was known as Greater Iran, comprising a large area from Anatolia, the Bosphorus, and Egypt in the West, to the borders of Ancient India and the Syr Darya in the East. It also encompassed the Caucasus and the Eurasian Steppe in the North to the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the South.

The Achaemenid Empire was founded by the Cyrus the Great, who is known for his human rights bill, the Cylinder, the world's first charter of human rights³ of the United Nations. He was the first Persian Emperor with a rule spanning three continents originating in Persepolis, from the Balkans to North Africa and Central Asia. Once a major empire, Persia went through several major invasions by Greeks, Arabs, Turks and Mongols. As a result, Iran has gone

³ Ferguson, Barbara G. B. "The Cyrus Cylinder--Often Referred to as the "First Bill of Human Rights." Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, vol. 32, no. 4, May 2013, pp. 38-39. EBSCOhost,ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=87022197&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed Dec, 2017.

through a major transformation and therefore developed a distinct national and cultural identity that embodies cultural diversity at its root. This includes the history of Jews who migrated and lived in Iran for over 2700 years. For example, Judaism is the second oldest religion that is still practiced in Iran after the Zoroastrian cult. Later, the Arab conquest of Persia led to the end of Sassanid Empire and gradual decline of Zoroastrian cult and other religions. This resulted in the dominance of Islam as a major religion in Iran. These political and historical changes transformed the culture and because of this I understood my Persian culture based in cultural diversity.

After becoming aware of the multiplicity of influences in my history, I looked into the “second space” colonial ⁴ culture in Canada. Looking back into the history of Canada, one may think of Canada as a peaceful and tolerant people. However, as I delve into this history, I learned about a much more disturbing past. Canadian Aboriginals in the early half of the 20th century were savagely treated and oppressed as a result of the European colonial culture as early as the 1550s. The impact of European colonization on the Canadian indigenous people, the host nation, includes exploitation in terms of commerce, trade, power, technology, and most important, their land and natural resources.⁵

Understanding Canadian history to me means knowing that France and Britain took over indigenous lands and resources and took control of several communities that later became Canada. By this means foreign settlers established their influence on the indigenous people.

⁴ Colonial culture:

The term cultural colonialism refers to two related practices: the extension of colonial power through cultural activities and institutions (particularly education and media) or the asymmetrical influence of one culture over another. The latter is most often understood as the cultural domination of Southern societies by the global North in the context of global capitalism, but may also refer to the “internal” repression of marginalized cultural groups within a state or territory or to individual cultural identities. The term is sometimes used synonymously with “cultural imperialism” and includes more particular forms of cultural domination, including media, educational, academic, intellectual, scientific, and linguistic colonialism. The idea that culture can be a medium for political and economic power predates postcolonial theory in social and political thought. Amsler Sarah. George Ritzer Ed. “Cultural Colonialism”. Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology.

⁵ McMichael, Philip. 2016. "Instituting the Development Project".

Another way to understand Canadian culture was through the effects of colonization, destroying the indigenous way of life, losing their lands and mental and financial abuse, which resulted in losing their identity leading to cultural deterioration for the indigenous people⁶.

Although I did not experience the kind of oppression suffered by indigenous people, as an immigrant to Canada, I am sympathetic to and understanding of this history. Living in Canada, I had to adapt to the dominant culture and structure. I learned the dominant language of English, studied the dominant religion, Christianity, attended Canadian educational institutions and learned about the dominant culture. On the other hand, I learned positive things through the experience of working as a federal agent, for Canada Revenue Agency, the Federal Government of Canada. I was impressed by the way all employees were treated equally based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. This to me was an extraordinary experience that I rarely experienced elsewhere in the society. By that I mean, I have two different experiences of living in Canada. One is through my observations of the abusive colonial history of indigenous people. I felt this especially while living in Vancouver, BC, and the other was my experience of strict governmental law and order, which resulted in equality for all individuals in all aspects in the eyes of the law. This was a contradictory experience in which I could see the abuse of indigenous people on one side and on the other side human rights regulations applied to all citizens working for the government of Canada. This experience always brought me joy, but was undercut knowing the legacy of colonialism and the injustices committed on the indigenous people. My governmental work experience, in a way, reminds me of the sublime experience I had in the Persian architectural palaces. This also connects to the contradictory experiences I have in my first space culture. On one side is the beautiful history of Cyrus the Great and the

⁶ Dubinsky, Karen, et al. *Canada and the Third World : Overlapping Histories*. University of Toronto Press, 2016.

Charter of Human Rights, and on the other side is the experience of repressive Islamic law and order, in which women and men are not equal. Both are part of my first space cultural identity.

I remember I always had problem with the rigidity that existed in my first space culture. The rigidity that pushed Persians to think all must follow the same Islamic religion and structures. My adaptation to Canadian culture opened my eyes, and changed how I view life today. I overcame that rigidity through working and being educated here in Canada. In Iran, all women must wear the veil or cover their hair with scarf and there are no individual rights in the one's personal choice about how to be dressed. This perhaps is only a small example of the rigidity that I am talking about in my first space culture.

It is through all these experiences of both my first space and second space cultures that I understand my diverse cultural background, the complexity of the life we live. A combination of first and second spaces resulted in the emergence of my third space culture where my hybrid identity emerges, as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha. I need to reflect this through the materiality and physical appearance of my art objects. My sculptures are infused with the cultural amalgamation that results from contact between the traditions of my first space culture and the modernism of my second space culture. I make sculptural objects that demonstrate a multilayered integration of materials and media. Using a minimalist approach of, reduction and simplicity, I apply a multilayered integration of materials — such as mirrors, concrete⁷, plaster — in different formats — such as sculpture/installation and painting — to help me to manifest the theoretical concept of “third space culture” which can metaphorically reflect the interweaving of cultural elements in the construction of my hybrid identity. The material part of my sculpture connects to my childhood experiences of the architectural palaces in my hometown. It is

⁷ Fig 1-4. *Identification Series (Hybridity)*, Images on page 15-18.

demonstrating in the same materials I experienced in the Persian Palaces: mirror, concrete, and plaster, and connects this to the contemporary sensibility I have developed living in Canada.



Fig 1. *Identification Series (Hybridity)*. 2015.

Material: Concrete, Wood, Mirror Glass (Hand Made), Plexiglas, Plaster and Acrylic paint.

Size: H 8" X W 6x4" X D 0.25x1.5"



Fig 2. *Identification Series (Hybridity)*. 2015.

Material: Concrete, Mirror Glass (Hand Made).

Size: H 3" X W 3" X D 1.5"



Fig 3. *Identification Series (Hybridity)*. 2015.

Material: Concrete, Wood, Mirror Glass (Hand Made), Plexiglas, Plaster and Acrylic paint.

Size: H 12" X W 9" X D 0.75x1.5"



Fig 4. *White Wash Series (Hybridity)*. 2015.

Material: Steel, Concrete, Mirror Glass, Plexiglas, Plaster, Wood, Acrylic paint.

Size: 1st Piece H42" X W35" X D4"

2nd Piece H36" X W25" X D4"

3rd Piece H36" X W32" X D4"

Later, when I started my studies at York University, I expanded and shifted my research, regarding the potentiality of material things. My initial questions were about the effect of materiality on our bodies and mind. How do physical materials impact upon us? I started asking questions about whether we could separate ourselves from the material world that exists beyond the self? Or what is the relation between physical material and the non-physical? What is real in this world and what is not real? Do we use our full body power and are we connected and impacted by other bodies?

I remember when I first got to York university I sensed a strong oppressed feeling within the environment of the Goldfarb Centre. I walked around the campus and I sensed the same oppressive feeling. Later, I noticed all my colleagues felt this and talked about the same impression they had about York University and especially the Goldfarb Centre. The gloomy centre with little light in addition to the heavy industrial materials used in the construction of the building, in addition to the dark blue tone was partly why Goldfarb created an oppressive feeling. This was the starting point, from which I asked myself again about the potentiality and force of the material world that surrounds us and its' impact on our bodies. Why do we feel different in different environment? What is it about material things that makes us feel different in different places? This is when I started to think about the possible opportunities of connecting my use of gold reflective material and the Goldfarb architectural building. I asked myself: is there any way I could activate the architectural building with the positive energy of the gold reflective material?

Out of these questions a new phenomenological approach emerged for me to research the potentiality of art's materiality. I started looking into New Materialism⁸ theories and was mostly

⁸ New Materialism – A Definition: “In short, the new materialist tends to rediscover materiality in the immanent mode of self-transformation, thus allowing us to think of causation in more complex terms. This is to recognize this phenomenon as a multitude of interlocking relationships and forces, the reflection within which locates the nature of capacities and agencies.”

Coole, Diana H., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Duke University Press, 2010,

influenced by Brian Massumi, a Canadian philosopher, and Karan Barad, a New Materialist feminist theorist and physicist. Their ideas were relevant to my practice. Brian Massumi focuses on the potentiality, or the force, of the material/physical thing and Karan Barad has formulated an idea of intra-activity within things, and links the origin of things to vacuum fluctuation and quantum field theory, which I will discuss later in this paper.

In my *Poetics of Materiality* project, materiality is a leitmotif in an artwork that aims to visualize potentiality and possibility, spanning the scientific and the cosmic, while drawing on sources as wide-ranging as New Materialism and contemporary physics.

Similarly, it is by negotiating the relationship between the artist, the material object, the spectator and the space and within a vocabulary of coexisting opposites — such as past/present, human/non-human, physical/non-physical, visible/non-visible, external/internal, and particular/universal — that I explore concepts of intra-activity and the force materiality of the artwork. My objective is to ascertain the significance of materiality as an extension of ontology through the material experience and force of the work of art.

Chapter Two: Poetics of Materiality

This research project is my investigation of materiality, the physical/non-physical aspect of things, in art and its' relation to the ontology of things, with a particular focus on material potentials, the interrelation between material art, space, artist, and spectator. The material experimentation in my research project reveals itself through my artistic creation, both 2D and 3D visual art media such as sculpture/installation⁹ and drawings. Through sculpture/installation artwork, visual impact is created by addressing the whole space of the gallery to generate a potential condition of material through scale to dominate space. The use of unusual and ambiguous materials in vast quantities is intended to transform the space, stimulate the imaginative mind of the spectator and to generate meaning by immersing the viewer in a vivid psychological encounter.

⁹ Installation Art – A Definition: Claire Bishop's interpretation in her article "Introduction Installation Art and Experience" refers to 'Installation art' as a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters the art space, and which is often described as 'theatrical, 'immersive' or 'experiential'" (p.1) She argues that installation today refers to any arrangement of objects in any given space, or even a conventional display of painting on the wall.

Section A: The Theoretical and Conceptual Background, New Materialism

New Materialism:

In my research, I am looking at different theorists of the New Materialist movement. I am particularly interested in the phenomenological approach of Brian Massumi, a Canadian philosopher; another is Karan Barad, an American new materialist feminist physicist theorist.. Brian Massumi focuses on the potentiality or the force of the material/physical thing and Karan Barad talks about the Intra-activity within things and links the origin of things to vacuum fluctuation and quantum field theory.

According to Brian Massumi and Karan Barad, theorists of the New Materialism, as humans inhabiting a material world we are surrounded and immersed in matter. Our bodies are also composed of matter and we consume matter. In all levels of life, we encounter the physical world, the natural forces that structure our daily routines for survival. Our existence each moment depends on the relation between countless micro-organisms and diverse higher species, between human bodily and cellular reactions, cosmic motions, and the human-made material and natural structures that make up our environment, and on the socio-economic structures that produce and reproduce the conditions of our everyday lives. Based on the power of matter and the ways it materializes our everyday experiences, one must acknowledge the importance and primacy of matter in our life. It is a unique capacity of the artwork to make this apparent – and New Materialism is relevant in particular to the artwork I am making.

In short, the New Materialism tends to rediscover materiality in the immanent mode of self-transformation, thus allowing us to think of causation in more complex terms. This is to recognize this phenomenon as a multitude of interlocking relationships and forces, the reflection within which locates the nature of capacities and agencies.

According to the New Materialisms, if everything is material inasmuch as it is composed of physicochemical processes, nothing is reducible to such processes, at least as conventionally understood. For materiality is always something more than “mere” matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable¹⁰.

Section B: The Theoretical and Conceptual Background
Affect Theory, Brian Massumi - Understanding

Affect refers to embodied, intersubjective experience. It can be seen as a space of ‘opening out’ and change. It can be seen as a space of transference and movement, force and potentiality. This space is a liminal ‘in-between-ness’ — it is a transitional space, that of non-conscious space, the autonomic function or deep reactions. To better understand affect, I introduce Brian Massumi’s interpretation of this subject matter.

In his reading of affect theory, Massumi links “affect” to a key terms in his research: the virtual and the intensity. Massumi understands affect as the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other. He states: “Affect is this two-sidedness as seen from the side of the actual thing, as couched in its perceptions and cognitions. The virtual, in turn, is linked to the human perception of external stimuli.”¹¹

Massumi equates intensity with affect, which allows for the radical differentiation between it and emotion. While for Massumi emotions are personal and belong to the domain of the self, the affect is an extra- or intersubjective phenomenon. The affect is the non-conscious,

¹⁰ Coole, Diana H. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Duke University Press, 2010,

¹¹ Massumi, Brian. “The Autonomy of Affect.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31, 1995, pp. 83–109. www.jstor.org/stable/1354446.

potentiality, and the experience of intensity. As a result, a person can be emotional, but a thing cannot. Intensity does not produce meanings but is capable of changing them: “It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption”¹², which disappears at the very moment we attempt to locate and describe it but modifies the narratives we produce.

According to Massumi affect is a constantly changing state of flux; the body is the source of the affect, but the affect is not easily definable by language. It exists outside of it and precedes it ¹³. The affect lurks in the intersubjective space created by encounters of bodies(things/people). Massumi refers to Spinoza’s understanding of bodies: “What a body is...is what it can do as it goes along.” It is the capacities that are carried by a body, step-by-step. These capacities change constantly and can be understood as the body’s ability to affect and be affected at the same time. Massumi argues that this capacity “depending on the circumstances, it goes up and down gently like a tide, or maybe storms and crests like a wave, or at times simply bottoms out. It’s because this is all attached to the movements of the body that it can’t be reduced to emotion ¹⁴.”

Massumi also finds the affect’s place of residence in things. Things can affect but can not have emotion. Things can move us and create emotions in us but affect is not emotion. He also sees a relation between affect and affected. He talks about the affect as the realm of potential, where future and past are combined ¹⁵ Affect is a capacity that exist within things. He sees a relation between affect and affected. Massumi refers to emergence, potential, and intensity in his

¹² Massumi, Brian. “The Autonomy of Affect.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31, 1995, pp. 86. www.jstor.org/stable/1354446.

¹³ Massumi, Brian. “Navigation movement: Interview by Mary Zournazi”. *Politics of Affect*. Oxford: Wiley, 2015. pp. 1-46. Ebook Library. Web. 23 Nov. 2016.

¹⁴ Massumi, Brian. “Navigation movement: Interview by Mary Zournazi”. *Politics of Affect*. Oxford: Wiley, 2015. pp. 1-46. Ebook Library. Web. 23 Nov. 2016.

¹⁵ Massumi, Brian. “Navigation movement: Interview by Mary Zournazi”. *Politics of Affect*. Oxford: Wiley, 2015. pp. 1-46. Ebook Library. Web. 23 Nov. 2016.

description of what affect is: “They always go together. When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before¹⁶.”

Similarly, it is through use of unusual material and color, the reflective gold, in my works that I reveal the force/potentiality of material, create a condition of opening and infinite possibility. It is through the force of materiality of my artworks that the viewer is impacted and resulting in strong feelings and emotions. Through my use of reflective gold materials, I aim to fill the space with the reflective potential of gold on the surrounding space to show the condition of excess that is open to all kinds of possibilities.

Section C: The Theoretical and Conceptual Background *Quantum Field Theory/Intra-action: Karan Barad*

A different way of understanding these ideas is provided by, Karan Barad. She argues in the article “Transmaterialities: Trans/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings” that matter is not a “substance,” but rather “intra-activity” — a concept that has some resonance with Massumi’s idea of the actual and the virtual. With a background in theoretical physics, Barad links the origin of things to vacuum fluctuation and quantum field theory (QFT). She explains the classical theory of physics, which posits the vacuum as complete emptiness with no matter and energy. However, if the zero state, the zero energy, and zero matter are not determinately zero, the empty state could not be determinately empty. So, the indeterminate is responsible for the void and it cannot be nothing — and in fact is a responsible source of being and all there is, a womb that gives birth to all the matter and beings to existence¹⁷. According to QFT, particles are

¹⁶ Massumi, Brian. “Navigation movement: Interview by Mary Zournazi”. *Politics of Affect*. Oxford: Wiley, 2015. pp. 1-46. Ebook Library. Web. 23 Nov. 2016.

¹⁷ Barad, Karen. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs*, vol. 28, no.3, 2003, pp. 801–831. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,

matter and fields are energy. In this article, Barad argues that the electromagnetic is what brings life to the existence and “the quantum of the electromagnetic field is a photon — a quantum of light”¹⁸. She talks about the state of emptiness as the vacuum fluctuation, the state of energy-time indeterminacy, where the energy and matter are equivalent. The indeterminacy in the energy of the vacuum is directly related to an indeterminacy in the number of particles associated with the vacuum. In this case: “the vacuum is not (determinately) empty, nor is it (determinately) not empty. These particles that correspond to the quantum fluctuation of the vacuum, that are and are not there as a result of the time-being indeterminacy relation, are called “virtual particles.” The virtual particles are not present or absent, they are not in the void but of the void and on the edge of non/being. The void is the tension or the desire toward being and becoming. The void is the burst with innumerable what might yet have been. The classical zero state is then the state of void; it is the virtuality of the material wandering/wonderings of nothingness. The void is not vacuous — rather is a living or the state of indeterminacy of non/being¹⁹.

According to Barad, Intra-action is a mutual constitution of entangled agencies and the act within. Intra-action is the mingling of people and things and their ability to act. When individuals materialize through intra-actions, the ability to act emerges from within the relationship not outside of it. By contrast, when things “interact” the bodies maintain a level of independence, meaning that each entity exists before they encounter one another.

Barad talks about matter agency, the response-ability — the ability to respond, and that “agency” is not an exclusively human attribute. She sees agency as the “enactment of iterative

¹⁸ Barad, Karen. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs*, vol. 28, no.3, 2003, pp. 801–831. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,

¹⁹ Barad, Karen. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs*, vol. 28, no.3, 2003, pp. 801–831. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,

changes” across in the smallest macro/microscopic levels of matter. She argues, that “matter is performative in that it (re) produces itself through the effects of its own intra-active dynamic material relationships”.

For Barad, matter is not a fixed substance, matter is rather an ongoing intra-activity and in its state of becoming. She pinpoints physicist Niels Bohr’s argument, which calls into question the dualisms of object/subject, knower/known, nature/culture, and word/world. Properties or meanings are not apart from their mutual intra-actions. Karen Barad does not see matter as a passive or an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is rather an ongoing interactivity, an unfixed substance that exists within phenomena. It is a particular materialized/materializing relationship, in an ongoing iteratively intra-active reconfiguring intra-active relationship. Matter is substance in its intra-active becoming with agency, rather than a thing. She argues that even the Phenomena—the smallest material units, atoms, come to matter through the ongoing intra-active process.

On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity. Phenomena—the smallest material units (relational “atoms”)—come to matter through this process of ongoing intra-activity ²⁰.

Similarly, it is through the sculptural/installation space of the void I construct that the intra-active relation between all things physical/non-physical and the forces and potentiality of the material is demonstrated. *It Is And It Is Not* ²¹ is a wall installation, covered with reflective

²⁰ Barad, Karen. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs*, vol. 28, no.3, 2003, pp. 801–831. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,

²¹ Fig 3. *It Is And It Is Not* Series, page 10.

gold, depending upon each spectator's personal encounter with the wall installation and the physical space it is presented in. The installation, gold reflective Mylar, reflects the state of emptiness and nothingness that gives form to infinity through the materiality. At first it looks like a flat empty gold surface but as you look into it and move in front of it, it becomes three dimensional. It mirrors all its surrounding but in a distorted way. It stimulates imaginative mind of viewer. It is with the physicality (physical body) of visitors and the materiality of the gold that the work in placement completes itself. Once the viewer moves in front of the piece, they become one with the artwork and the space. *It Is And It Is Not* pulls the spectator into its experience, which is a realm of non-fixity, unknown, ambiguity and potentiality. It merges spaces and infuses the oppositional boundaries of real verses unreal, subject, viewer/artist, and object, artwork. It reflects the intra-active relation between all things and people. An empty gold reflective space, which to me it resembles the notion of quantum field theory, atoms move bringing something from the nothingness; the paradox of creation from the void, the state of being and non-being. The gold reflective space also connects to the concept of vacuum fluctuation, where everything comes to be. The gold reflective material creates a condition which projects infinite possibilities through its flexible materiality.

Chapter Three

Section A: Theories and Their Relation to My Practice

Working with materials in my art practice, I developed an interest in the theories of New Materialism and the study of materiality in the art. I always had questions about the impact of material forces on the human mind and body and curiosity about the relationship between physical and non-physical world. All of these were initiated and based on my life experiences. For this, the new materialism theories brought clarity to some of my key questions about the effect of materiality on our bodies and mind. Question such as how physical materials impact upon us and this includes learning about the relation between the binary oppositions, and the physical and non-physical world and the fact that both our physical world and non-physical world coexist and function together, simultaneously. It is through the experience of working with physical material that I realize the causation in its complexity: materiality and its self-transformative nature, its intertwined relationships in the state within and outside it, and the forces or potentiality that reflects the nature and capacities of the material world. All of these are achieved through an act of the process and production in my art practice. By process I mean, being physically and mentally involved with materials like reflective gold and black charcoal, to plan, prepare and create the artworks. It is through the performative act of process that I learn about the interrelation between all physical and non-physical world, the potentiality, the invisible and on-physical force, that is experienced through the physical material.

The process to me is, the simultaneous performative act of mind and body and its relation to the material art entangles the physical and non-physical aspect of art making in a constant performative act of the process. The processes in which the material reproduces itself through its relation to other physical material both people and things. The reflective gold Mylar material, the charcoal that requires my physical engagement in the process of making. I buy premade

charcoal, select pieces of different sizes and try to glue them to the board without any preconceived plan and rather, simultaneously. This allows me to structure the object as I work on it. For the reflective gold Mylar, I only need to embed them to the material underneath, whether if the material is the wall or cotton canvas. All the physical involvement of my body and the gold reflective Mylar, and charcoal material, the process of seeing and touching the material through which I develop the artwork — and allows the spectator's interaction with it. The process of constant change. This allows me to understand the unpredictability of the world, the state of constant change, the relation between physical/non-physical, the potentiality or forces of a physical thing, and self-creative and productive nature of all things that could affect our human minds and bodies.

To be clearer on this, it is through working and examining the reflective material that the intra-active relation between all things physical/non-physical and the forces and potentiality of the material is demonstrated. The reflective Mylar film mirrors its surroundings, creating a space in which there are no beginning and end. It reflects openness referencing the state of emptiness and nothingness that gives form to infinity in this is quantum field theory. Space is filled with gold reflective material, this fills the space with potentiality by creating various possible visual effects as the light projects through the material. Also, as the viewer encounters an unrealistic image of self in the reflective material and moves back and forth their images in the reflective material changes. This quality of the material and its color creates the condition of excess and possibilities by resembling the energy and potentiality of the sun, metaphorically. The flat reflective sheet mirrors the space and things within that space creating an illusion of infinity and the sublime (perhaps). The material, space, artist and the viewer merge together and unite in one singular moment as they are in the golden space. The golden space, metaphorically also

resembles the idea of an empty space through which atoms move and brings something from the nothingness; the paradox of creation from the void, from vacuum fluctuation, an empty space in quantum field theory.

Chapter Four

Section A: The Material Potential Art in The “Poetics of Materiality”: *It is, And It Is Not* (2017-18)

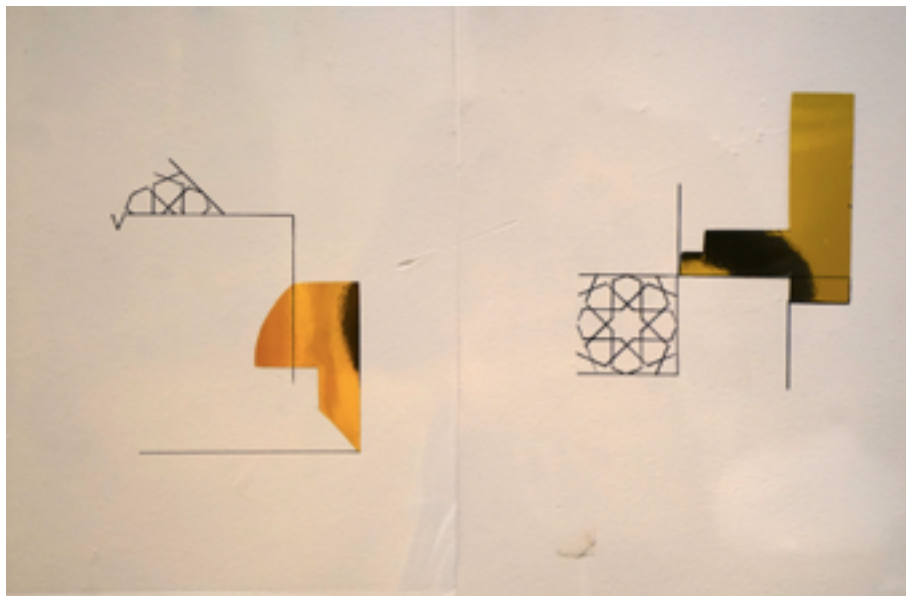
The *Poetics of Materiality: It Is And It Is Not* is the title of my thesis show. *The Poetics of Materiality* is the last part of the *It Is And It is Not* drawing and installation series. I chose this title for the reason that I felt if poetry is about the imagination, the materiality of my work is creating the same impact. My work creates curiosity and stimulates the imaginative mind of the viewer through its materiality of gold reflective and black. It creates condition of possibilities through its abstract presentation, forces and potentiality, it infuses the oppositional boundaries of physical/non-physical, real/unreal and subject/object and at the same time it is also reflection of my identity. The material potentiality that brings about the interconnectivity between all, to me this is purely poetic and is what poetry is capable of doing.

As we live in a physical world interacting with the physicality of the world around us, each material thing creates a feeling and influences our lives through its forces of physicality. This observation, based on my childhood experience of materiality of the palaces, led me to investigate the subject of materiality in my art practice. For me, forming a physical/material work requires an engagement and exploration with various material resources. Through these experience of the materiality, I investigate the role of artwork as a manifestation of ontology.

This material investigation not only impacts the appearance and meaning of the piece, but also shapes the experience of the artist during and after the exploration, and at the same time affects viewers, allowing them to experience the materiality of the artwork within the space in different

ways. This connects me to my childhood, York University and experiences of the royal palaces — such as Kakh Golestan, Kakh Sadabad and Goldfarb Centre. It was the force of the royal palaces' materiality, affecting me/viewer and resulting the sublime experience. Similarly, Goldfarb Centre's material potentiality in which it resulted in the creation of *Poetics of Materiality* This also make reference to Brian Massumi, who talks about the force/potentiality of the materiality, the relation between the invisible, where potentiality lays, and the physical material, the visible part of the material experimentation in which brings about different feelings and impacts. I often think that it was to do with the strong force of the materiality of these palaces that I have been driven this far to the extend I started researching and studying materiality and the force of thing in my art practice. To me the material force is a real experience, indeed.

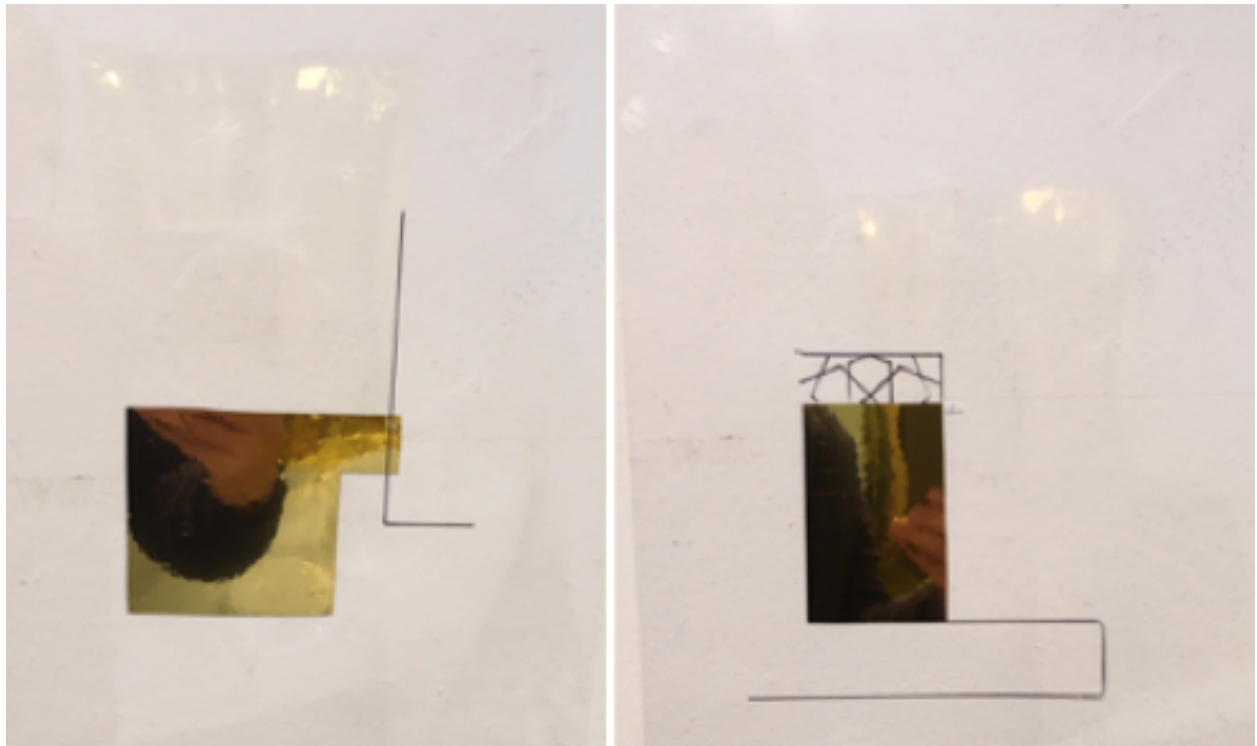
Take *It Is And It Is Not* drawing series²² as an example, they are made of gold reflective Mylar, clear acetate sheet and black drawing pen. These drawings also connect to my



childhood experience of the architectural palaces. I draw simple black lines that resemble

²² Fig. 5. *It Is And It Is Not*. Drawing Series. Page 25.

different geometric shapes that extend to the field of acetate paper, creating open paths, alluding new possibilities. One can sense the oppositional sense of completeness and non-completeness through open shapes in an open field of acetate, in combination with the drawings²³. This stimulates the imaginative mind of the viewers in visualizing the complete possible shapes or forms, based on the own unique way that they understand and connect to the work. To me, this is the way viewers reflect on a state of constant becoming and constant change. This is how I project the realm of potentiality. *It Is And It Is Not* leads the imaginative mind of the viewers to new forms or conditions through the openness of the work's shapes, and also its materiality. This is the way the materiality of *It Is And It Is Not* reveals its potentiality, suggesting the condition of openness and the state of constant becoming.



²³ Fig 6. *It Is And It Is Not*. Drawing Series. Page 26.

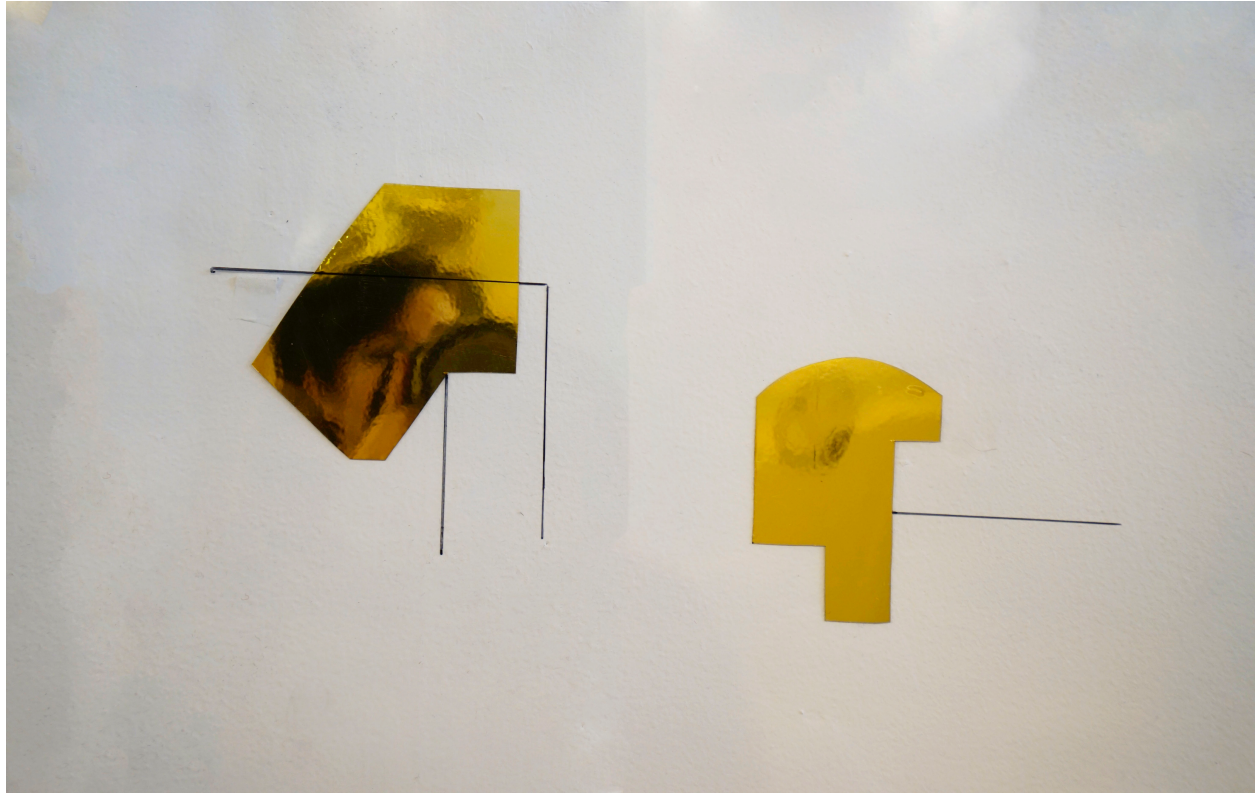


Fig 7. *It Is And It Is Not (Drawing Series)*. 2015.

Material: Mylar Film, Acetate, Ink Pen.

Size: H 11" X 16"

In *It Is And It Is Not* (both drawing and installation), as spectators experience an artwork, they connect on a deeper and emotional level with the artist, the artwork's creator. The potentiality of the material work of art coexists with its physicality, through which it elicits an emotional response from the viewers. To me, the materiality of my artwork is both its physical matter and the experience of it. The materiality of the artwork I create locates viewers within their corporeal selves by engaging their senses. As a visual experience, each viewer will engage with the materiality of my artwork in different ways. The first thing the viewer experiences is the aesthetic dimension of the artwork, which is sensed through the artwork's materiality and the physical and visual components. Next, interaction with the artwork happens based on the ideas, and experiences it conveys. The physicality of an artwork functions and provides meaning through its means of production and the degree of process, performing series of actions including planning, managing, operating tools to produce a result that is evident in the final work; this impact how the spectators experience the work beyond its materiality. For example, whether the artwork is handmade or made by machine is a significant part of the materiality of the artwork, and will elicit different responses and forms of engagement from the spectator.

This also connects to the idea of Karan Barad "Intra-action", the mingling of people and things and their ability to act. As she argues that the individuals materialize through the intra-active process and mentions that matter is not a fixed substance, matter is rather an ongoing intra-activity and in its state of becoming. This idea again takes me back to my childhood experience. I see that there is this constant relationship between the past and present material world that connects everything on an ocean of intra-connectivity. I as the viewer (as a child) came in touch with the physical material palaces and carried the sublime experience of their materiality and that experience is reproducing itself in different shapes and forms in my life. It is

the past material experience that has reproduced itself in my art practice and artwork today. The material art I create also will reproduce new experiences in the viewer and this cycle goes on and continue recreating itself in different ways as each individual/viewer experience and encounter the physical artworks.

The idea that Barad argues in her article. The world that entangled in all its aspects. All physical and non-physical matter links together and is in the ocean of process, an ongoing intra-activity and in its state of constant becoming. It is through the physicality of my artwork, the reflective gold that mirrors all activity within the space and that I reflect the idea of Barad's intra-action. For this, my artwork, tangible outcomes of my practice, reflects in the form of physical propositions, such as installations in which it is a manifestation of ontology.

Section B: Process

In the process of making my artwork, I first begin with the visualization of my ideas. I think and take note of various kinds of visual or material ideas and mentally plan the procedure for making these art projects. I make notes, through which I document my ideas and plans. I take notes on my material options and how to use a space or where to make the artwork. Making and designing the work happens once I have all materials ready in my studio. Once the material is there I begin working with it and designing it simultaneously. For this, the thinking about and process of making the work and the final result are all attached to both the physical and non-physical processes of my bodily involvement. For example, as I think and plan, taking notes, next is to proceed to buy the materials. This brings the invisible thought process to the visible physical material stage, where I proceed with the creation of the physical artwork.

The process of making my work is both time and energy consuming, and almost like a performance in itself. To a certain extent, it is a ritual experience that leads to self-awareness.

The process of seeing and touching the material through which I develop the artwork — and allows the spectator's interaction with it — results in meanings and at the same time is a meditative process. Making the work is very physically and mentally demanding and requires both time and energy. The process is a spiritual and sensual experience. My mind, vision, hands and full body are working together to make the project come into existence. My mind is in constant search for a solution; it searches for the relation between things/materials, as my eyes see the material and things my mind is in a state of judgment, of finding the relation between things based on aesthetics and what can theoretically match my working concept. My visual and tactile senses, working together with my mind, allow me to interact with things around me and to reinforce the relationship between me and others (human/non-human) through my artworks.

Materials inspire me to think and act at the same time. I am always surrounded by materials in my living space and working studio space. I use highly versatile industrial materials such as reflective film, charcoal, cotton canvas, a variety of vinyls and plastics, acetate, wood and mirror glass. Working with my hands, I put these materials together to make an artwork. For example, in my drawings, I take the acetate paper and place it on a clean, dust-free surface. Next, I cut the gold Mylar into the geometric shapes I am interested in. Third, I draw the lines or other geometric shapes extending from the gold Mylar. There is always a physical touch of the material going on in the creative process of the artwork. For this, I see them as the physical extension of my body. My bodily performative act, my body and mind functioning, reconfigure itself through an artwork. I see my works as an extension of my body and mind — not as separate from myself, but me as reconfigured in the artwork. It's a manifestation of self, a reflection of my thoughts and bodily experiences and the performative acts of my process.

Another point I learn in the process of making artwork is about ephemerality and the

constant change that comes with everything around us. The way one's thoughts and ideas are undergoing constant modification, together with the ephemerality of physical movement and materials that are subject to change. As I work on a project, an idea goes through several changes and transitions until it can be developed into something presentable. Even then, as my thought develop and I learn through life experiences, my way of seeing things and understanding things undergoes change simultaneously. It is through this process of developing an idea to the point of making it, that I learn about interconnectivity and the entanglement between all things, about the performative physical/non-physical world that is subject to change. From this, I learn and understand the ephemeral nature of all things. A drawn line in my drawings, for example, can quickly become lost in a field of lines; a gold coloured piece of film can lose its intensity over time and simply fade in its color or crumple, scratch, and change to something else, almost immediately. Or the foam underneath the gold reflective film can easily crumble. A finished work of a drawing may look permanent and fixed, but it can always transform into something else, once it is reworked, or by deteriorating its materiality.

Pushing material across a surface is an impermanent experience that reveals non-fixity at its core. Mylar, acetate, ink pen and all other materials I use during the process, or that I hold in my hands allow me to move in a non-fixed manner. My body movement during the process of drawing is constantly changing. I sit on a floor, where I lay the acetate on a board, stand in front of the wall where the acetate is placed or sit on a chair leaning over the table and repeatedly draw to the end of my physical energy. I engage my full body energy in the process of making all drawings. I view drawing as a transitory activity always on its way to becoming something else. To me, this reveals the ephemerality. The material and drawing both they lend themselves naturally to change their physical properties ephemeral and impermanent. This also mirrors my

personal unsettledness and a flexible form of cultural identity.

Light is another great element that shows changes in the appearance and physicality of an artwork. A mirror shows change in its reflections, and the light mirrors cast changes as time passes through the day. This also happens with gold reflective film, its reflections and shadows changing with time. Similarly, when a spectator moves around the installation, they can see the change in the reflections and shadows as they move around.

Hence, this awareness allows me to take an approach to my installation and drawing that shows the unsettledness of fixed categories, reflecting the plasticity of selfhood and the world around us. To me, fluidity/flux is a key element that allows for potentiality and for all possibilities to evolve. This is a flexible form of identity that exists in the material/physical world and allows changes and shows openness to all kinds of possibilities. Changes and movement are the constant part of our experiences in this world. It is a process which, when we are aware of it, reflects the interconnectivity between physical/non-physical world, reflecting the change and the ephemeral nature of all things.

Further, my process is a contemplative and spiritual act and is very private. I see myself as a seeker of truth and look for where I can find truth, and understand the relation between life and death, existence and non-existence.

Section C: It Is And It Is Not (2017-18)

It Is And It Is Not (2017-18) is a title of my artworks series. The way to access this work series beside the process is through its color, sculptural space of voids and its connection to my hybrid identity. It is constructed from flexible material, gold mylar, a reflective self-adhesive film, foam and primed cotton canvas. I began with placing the foam on the floor like a blanket. I need a large space to be able to lay materials on the floor and physically manoeuvre around it to

adhere the gold reflective film to it. First, I cut the foam to the size I need. Next, I have to attach the gold mylar to the foam or a cotton canvas, while the foam is still laid on the floor. This is a very sensitive act and needs all my attention. If the gold mylar is not placed properly it either extends beyond the foam, or if I have to re-place it and redo the job, the mylar can get crumpled and turns into something else in terms of its texture. This material is very sensitive and does tend to do its own thing rather than listening to my direction. In making these pieces, the artist and the material take fifty-fifty role in the appearance of the artwork. This tells me that a material also exists on its own does it own thing, as it likes. The result of this collaboration between the artist and the material art is that the crumpled versions can results in magnificent reflective patterns that happen accidentally.

The final process is to see how and where to install the work. Because of the materials I use, an important consideration is my lack of control on how the artwork will turn out. It can, for instance, adapt to the pattern of the material underneath. It is through the interrelationship between the reflective film, the foam and cotton canvas underneath, the uneven floor surface and the artist's physical movement and touch that the artwork takes its form and shape. My physical involvement, the touch of my hand in constant relation to my mind and my thinking about how to use the material to create a certain impact is an important element in the production of the artworks. My energy and the forces of materials, and physical and other site factors are in constant interaction with one and other in the process and production of an artwork.

To me, this process is about the diffusion of the precise and rather the chaotic interrelation among things. The infused or blurred boundaries are what I am interested. The infusion and the integration of the boundaries make it difficult to choose and separate one from the other one. To me, this is where life happens and opens itself to all kinds of possibilities. Its at

the edge of physical and non-physical where the pulsation becomes sensible. I am infatuated with that openness and the infinite ocean of possibilities that the materiality of the artwork allows me to dive into. The wall installation²⁴ is closed in its form yet open and infinite in its materiality.



I am interested in how things are structured and the way they make us relate to them in different ways. I am interested in the relation between things the interaction between the visible

²⁴ Fig 8. *It Is And It Is Not*. Wall Installation. Size: H 85"xW 115". Page 34.

and non-visible that allows all sort of possibilities. Being open to my process is what has led me to the discovery of these things and realization of the interconnectivity of our physical and non-physical world. This is a process of learning that leads me to more and more discoveries, and this is why I am interested in researching and experimenting with materiality. This makes my work purely experiential and not representing the form but rather the pulsation or the force of the form.

An important aspect of *It Is And It Is Not* is its color. I am looking to experiment with the forces of gold reflective films. I am interested to see the impact of color, when spectators are enveloped in the gold mylar and the reflection it creates. Through gold, I aim to fill the space with potentiality through its reflection, and the condition of excess and openness to all kinds of possibilities it creates. Yellow gold is the color of the sun with all its power and potentialities. To me, this is a colour for generating life in its fullest dimension. Yellow gold reflective film metaphorically links masculine energy and the power of the sun. Its the color of light, vitality, abundance, life, love, compassion, courage, confidence, magic and abundance all in one is projected through this colour. At the same time, it is eye-catching and draws attention to itself; it is this movement and the energy of the color that interests me. I think through the strong material of gold mylar I am able to bring to the physicality of non-physical colour. It's poetics of the color and its materiality and transcendental quality that it gently transports viewers into the realm of the imaginative. It suggests the realm of potentiality and possibilities, the unknown. The beauty of color to me is that it is completely non-verbal, and it embodies the idea of the "before thought" — the beginning, the something that exists in our gut, the primordial.

Color is important to me in the way it can materialize itself through substantial use. I tend to bring the materiality of the color to presence. Yellow gold illuminates and enhances things around us; it represents optimism and positivity and adds richness and warmth to everything with which it is associated. Gold references wisdom, understanding and enlightenment. Gold inspires knowledge, illumination, intellect, spirituality and a deep understanding of the self and the soul. Gold to me is both rich and a spiritual color that reveals the spiritual and meditative process of making art. Gold to me suggests success and achievement, triumph, extravagance and wealth, and is associated with logic and creativity, prosperity and quality, prestige and sophistication, value and elegance. This is what I am interested to show through the use of the colour gold.

Black, on the other hand, also to me reveals the condition of opening or beginning. It suggests a black hole, where gravity is so strong that no light can get out. It references the origin of the universe. I use the colour black in opposition to the colour gold. Black to me refers to death, depression, hopelessness, anxiety and grief, and yet is associated with power, elegance, and mystery. It represents the presence of all colours and is the colour of intimidation and limited emotion.

Hence, it is through the use of colour in my works that I create the condition of opening and infinite possibility. It is through colour that the oppositional boundaries of death/life are blurred. Together, gold and black show the coexistence and interrelation between the oppositional elements, metaphorically. Gold and black both create a strong impact, not as decoration for artworks but rather as a substance that carries deep value.

Gold and black together also reflect time. They both convey and connect not only the past but also the present. Black and gold take us to the beginning of the creation — the black holes

and light that have existed through time in many different ways, metaphorically. Black and gold together show the complexity of a relationship that appears divided, but that are united at its core. The black charcoal panel of *It Is And It Is Not* shows in the reflection of gold sheet installation, and the image of the black charcoal panel is seen in the reflective sheet on the wall. Together they mirror life and death. It's an integration of limit and limitedness and this complexity is represented by the borderless image combining space and charcoal panel through reflective gold mirror films. These sheets reveal an infinite, unknown ocean of possibilities and potentiality. All elements in the space including artist and spectator are connected and interrelated. Without one the function of the other becomes impossible, that's what I am interested to show.

To me, colour can indicate either a personal or a universalized space. Black color refers to a universal truth that is more abstract. Gold is the color of light, it's a condition of excess and extravagance it embodies culture and all the interconnections within society and things. I strive to bring to presence these relationships through the materiality of colour and make them visible to the human eye. The intentional use of gold Mylar and black charcoal bring colour to the physical and visible realms and reveal the intrinsic potentiality of color, along with the coexistence of opposites. The color in my artwork is meant to overwhelm and affect the spectators.

The gold and reflective wall and the floor charcoal installation ²⁵ *It Is And It Is Not* is strongly associated with colour and reveals potentiality through the colour relation it creates. Spectators are drawn into the artwork through the materiality of color, which is revealed through

²⁵ Fig 8-10. *It Is And It Is Not* Series, Page 34-39.

the mass sheets of reflective films and their reflection on and around the space and the massive floor charcoal panel. The shiny, reflecting gold surfaces with a black strip in the middle brings the oppositional elements into the attention of the viewers, immediately. To me, the charcoal texture in contrast to the soft reflective surface of the Mylar, one soft and the other rough and hard. It juxtaposes the light and darkness, the richness and poverty or even hell and heaven in one simultaneous moment. The oppositions are infused through color in this piece. *It Is And It Is Not* charcoal installation also reference my hybrid identity which I will discuss that later in my paper.



Fig 9. *It Is And It Is Not* Series

Material: Mylar, Cotton Canvas, wood, Acetate and Charcoal

Size: Wall Piece/ H 65" X W 45" / Floor Piece: 45"X24"



Fig 10. *It Is And It Is Not Series*

Material: Mylar, Cotton Canvas, wood, Acetate and Charcoal

Size: Wall Piece/ H 65" X W 45" / Floor Piece: 45"X24"



Fig 11. *It Is And It Is Not* Series.

It Is And It Is Not ²⁶intentionally create a theatrical encounter between the viewer and the work, and bring the viewer into a different space, the “Present Space.”



Fig 12. *It Is And It Is Not* Series

Material: Mylar.

Size: Wall Piece/ H 100” / W 325”

²⁶ Fig 12. *It Is And It Is Not* Series.

As the viewers manoeuvre around the seemingly flat work installations, they will notice that, as they move back and forth, their bodily image changes through the reflective mirror texture of the gold film. It shows both a real and unreal/distorted image of the person in front of it as she/he moves. The reflective gold shows the coexistence of the opposites, such as external/internal and real/ non-real, from the moment the viewer is in front of the work. The reflections cause a distortion of the viewer's body and intermixes and entangles viewers into shifting fractal reflections of the real and the unreal, the existing and non-existing. By this means, I intend to reflect the notion of ambiguity or what I call the realm of unknown. Also, the physical material of the reflective gold mylar in the corner of the wall creates a reflection on the facing wall, which creates a dynamic illusion of space. It subtly transports spectators to the realm of imagination. The transformative force of the gold object gives each individual a different perspective, and leads the viewer to experience the oppositions of life, such as creation and destruction. This is, in fact, all an effect of the force of materiality. The complexity of the content in this piece coexists with the simplicity of the flat geometrical rectangular shapes and leads the viewer into the realm of both the unknown and of self-awareness — bringing especially awareness about the coexistence of opposites. It is in the material experience of my work that all meanings are made.

The *It Is And It Is Not* installation reflects the state of emptiness and nothingness that gives form to infinity. From quantum theory we can take the idea that an empty space through which atoms move brings something from the nothingness; the paradox of creation from the void, the state of being and non-being that is what I am interested to show through my work. From the concept of vacuum fluctuation, we discover to the idea that the vacuum is the state of nothingness and being at the same time. It is through vacuum fluctuation that everything comes

to be.

Hence, *It Is And It Is Not* is a space of infinite possibilities, a potential space and not a non-space. It is a space more empty than a mere vacancy. The gold reflective sheets create a physical space, and this helps establish an emotional connection with the spectator. Through its materiality *It Is And It Is Not* suggests openness, potentiality, possibilities, and consciousness — and at the same time emptiness, and unknown. The gold reflective Mylar suggests vacuum fluctuation state; the state of flux, the paradoxical state of oppositions not/thingness.

Further, we try in our life to fix everything, but to me, life is not a fixed thing or a fixed idea. Life is rather an open platform and expands and changes shape and form all the time. This hope to see things fixed is universal because we try to understand things based on our conditioned mind. Especially in Persian culture, where I am from, things are strongly interpreted as either bad or good. I see this fixation is especially prevalent back in my motherland of Iran. Fixed ideas and a fixed way of seeing and fixed way of presentations are what I aim to get free from. What I am interested in is the openness that life offers us; or if you like, that state of constant change, movement and becoming that offers infinite possibilities and is naturally dynamic. I keep asking: How can I be fixed on anything if the root itself is not fixed? I am interested in that state of flux, and in that openness that allows all kinds of possibilities to emerge.

I made *It Is And It Is Not* in such a way that it depends upon each spectator's personal encounter with the object and the physical space it is presented in. It is with the physicality (physical body) of visitors that the work in placement completes itself. Once they move in front of the piece, they become one with the artwork and the space. *It Is And It Is Not* pulls the spectator into its experience, which is a realm of unknown. It merges spaces and infuses the

oppositional boundaries. Within it, one cannot see a separation between the artist, the art, the architectural space, the spectators. Everything comes together as one, simultaneously. The history of the space in which it was built, the artist's history, the process of research and the coming together of the material artwork, the spectator and their history all become one in a singular moment. Past, present and future is one in *It Is And It Is Not*. I am interested in the force behind the material that allows this to happen. This is the space of consciousness itself. My intention is to create the space of intra-connectivity that Karan Barad talks about: "Matter is performative and reproduces itself through effects of its own intra-active dynamic material relationship." What I like about this piece is that it teaches me how to see life.

It Is And It Is Not is installed on the wall loosely²⁷ to add to the idea of flexibility and to suggest fluctuating nature of things. It creates an elusive space through its material sensation. The piece is made from flexible material meaning the work's form can be easily changed and altered, and this is what I am interested in to show through my artworks. This flexible material and its reflective quality allows the oppositions of flatness and depth come together in the piece simultaneously. The film traces the pattern of the material underneath and on each one creates different visual patterns and impacts. To me, this journey between transparency and opaqueness is a journey of mind and connects the physical and non-physical body of us as humans. The ambiguity that leaves us for discovery and allows us the possibilities, is the space of potentiality. Ambiguity is multiple dimensional and allows imagination, and this is what I am interested in creating through my work. Ambiguity is what it allows possibilities to emerge. It resembles the vacuum fluctuation the state of the unknown where everything happens.

²⁷ Fig 8-8B. *It Is And It Is Not* Series, page 34 & 52.

Another way to access *It Is And It Is Not* is through its connection to my previous works that reflect my self-image of a hybrid identity. For me, the potentiality of the art's materiality reflects my self-image. When I think about my identity, I see it is present in all aspects of my art practice, both in the process and production of my artworks. One example is the way my studio²⁸ is put together and designed. My studio is cluttered with material and tools. English and Farsi books, contemporary theoretical texts, studio sculpture tools, Persian fabrics, acrylic plexiglass, glass mirrors of different colors, concrete, plasters, etcetera. I think of my studio as my spiritual home where my creative spirit frees itself in all its dimensions. I spend most of my time engaging with all these materials, creating my works, planning them, even eating there and communicating with others physically, one on one, or non-physically, on the phone or through emails. Even the way I work in my studio and on my projects, sitting on the floor being physically connected to the material, the way I plan, think and act, visualizing the project in my mind, visualizing the finished project, and then going ahead to gather the material I need to produce the work, to me they are all extensions of my body and mind — and therefore they manifest my identity.

Another way my identity is projected is through my choice of materials. In the charcoal installation, I chose black charcoal and reflective gold material that is associated with culture and history of my cultural origins. For example, the old and the new is presented in my works, simultaneously. The black is the new experience and cultural element from my first space culture. To me, it takes me back to the black veil(chador) wearing girl in Iran. The black veil was part of the female identity in a Islamic society. The old Zoroastrian understanding of light as God

²⁸ Fig 13-14. Studio: Goldfarb Centre for Fine Arts, York University, North York, ON, Canada. Page 53-54.

of goodness, the tradition of making architecture reflect light through the architectural embellishment using mirrors; on the other side, I have developed a contemporary Western taste, minimal and simple, that indicates my Canadian cultural identity. Together, these show my hybrid identity through the materiality of *It Is And It Is Not*. Also, I took on a minimalist approach to my work and learned about Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, of "third space culture," and the New Materialism of Brian Massumi and Karan Barad through my studies at educational institutions here in Canada. To me, these approaches represent my adaptation to Canadian culture and conceptual structures. By culture and structures, I mean the rules and customs of being and acting in the Canadian society. The governmental rules that apply to all individuals living in Canada that we all must obey, including the human rights and Canadian legislative principles that apply to all individuals and all institutions, public and private. I learned English to be able to communicate with others in Canada. I went to different churches for quite some time to learn about Christianity. I very much enjoyed associating with people in different churches I attended, although, one in particular, in North Vancouver, rejected me. When I asked "Why?" they said females are not allowed in their church. This reminded me of how women are not fully accepted in the culture and religion of Islam. Based on the Islamic law women are worth half of a man. Two women equals one man in the eyes of Islamic law. From this, I felt the problem of women's rights and equality exists everywhere, but to different degrees. Going to the churches was indeed my personal choice. I was always interested in religious and social studies and wanted to learn more about them. I also attended for the reason that Christianity is the primary religion in Canada and, now that I was part of this culture, I wanted to learn more about this religion as it has shaped the dominant culture in Canada. All of the above is what I mean when I talk about my socio-cultural adaptation to Canadian society. My cultural hybridity is

represented in all aspects of my life. To me, the old and the new or ancient traditions and modern contemporary costumes are infused in a single person, one who has a hybrid cultural identity.

For me, the materiality, process and production of *It Is And It Is Not* that reflect my self image.

Another way that the materials I use in my work link to my hybrid identity is through the way I use setting for my artworks in the exhibition space. A combination of a gold reflective canvas with a black strip in the middle of it and a rectangular platform of embedded black charcoal placed in the corner of the exhibition space create a feeling of disposition. The viewer could sense that the artwork is isolated or displaced. The isolation or the sense of displacement comes from the feeling of not belonging that results from me being a person of mixed cultural background. The sense of not belonging is always there within me. I have felt a sense of rejection in both countries I have lived in. My country of origin, Iran, gave me a feeling of uncertainty, incompleteness and a sense of rejection for being a girl and being part of a family of minority and mixed cultural origins of Zoroastrian, Jewish, Sufis, in a male and Islamic dominated society. Because of this, I always experienced fear and anxiety; and these feelings continue within me no matter where I live. I always felt not accepted as a girl and as a person of mixed cultural background in the country of my homeland, and this sense of rejection I also experience living in Canada. I always feel that I am a foreigner. I looked and talked different than the white-dominated people and culture of my adopted country and this resulted in feelings of rejection. Because of this, the setting of *It Is And It Is Not* embodies a sense of displacement referencing the idea of rejection that I have experienced in my life. *It Is And It Is Not* also embodies my positive life experiences and adaptation through the reflective gold that perpetuate beauty and glamor of advanced capitalist societies such as Canada. *It Is And It Is Not* merges the

positive and negative experiences as a whole and reflects the hybrid identity through its setting as well as its materiality.

Section D: Influential Artists

Two artists have influenced my line of practice. One is Anish Kapoor, a contemporary sculptor with a mixed cultural background of Indian, British and Jewish descent. His art practice involves a phenomenological approach, based on the experience of materiality and the creative act. He sees process as an important element of his practice, which leads him into meanings. He sees the material investigation as a journey in which the artist encounters new possibilities and discovers meanings. Kapoor explores materiality to learn about the nature of things. The potentiality of things and the interrelationship between spectators, space, architect and objects are the areas he focuses on in his practice. Color, geometry, and the void seems to be a significant aspect of his art practice. Kapoor's cultural background is embedded in his work. Use of void reference to Hindu concept of Sunyata, emptiness and Samkhya, dualities. Kapoor's artworks are intended to move beyond the object. The complexities of Kapoor's sculptures and installations emphasize on the nature of his materials, such as the use of intense colors and forms. The experiential agency of the viewer is also a key element. Oftentimes viewers are presented with a stage-like installation that requires exploration, and may generate unexpected responses. Finally, the references to spaces and voids found in the Kapoor's artworks lead viewers into inward, psychological, or spiritual realms.

Shirazeh Houshiari is a contemporary multidisciplinary Iranian-British artist. Her practice encompasses painting, installation, architectural projects and film. She is a former Turner Prize nominee, and lives and works in London. Her work is identified with sculptors of her generation, including Anish Kapoor. However, her work remains distinct as it shows a strong influence of

Persian poetry. Her practice spans the scientific and cosmic and draws on contemporary physics and poetry. Houshiari intends her work to be very meditative. Ambiguity is what interests Houshiari, as she understands this as a space of possibilities.

In her paintings, Houshiari's use of intense hues and intricate detail refers to infinity while drawing the viewer into an experiential relationship with the work that seems to evoke a multiple visual and imaginative possibilities.

Chapter Five

Section A: Conclusion: *Summary of the Research*

My art practice takes a phenomenological approach, revolving around the subject of the new materialism and taking the affect theory of Brian Massumi and the QFT/Intra-action theory of Karan Barad into consideration. My dissertation objective is to reveal and visualize potentiality, the force of material things, and the condition of their possibility. It is through this material experimentation that the interrelation between all oppositional binaries is revealed.

Through my exploration of the format of installation that I explore concepts of the materiality in art, using a vocabulary of the coexistence of opposites such as: past/present, human/non-human, physical and non-physical, visible and non-visible, external/internal, and particular and universal. The relationship between the material thing, the artist, the spectator and the space and their relation to time/history are revealed through my artwork. Materiality in my practice encompasses a wide variety of physical and non-physical aspects; it covers all relevant information related to the artwork, including origins, history, and both physical and non-physical, visible and non-visible involvement within the process, to the end result production of the artwork.

Chapter six
Section A: Images



Fig. 15

Title: *It Is And It Is Not* Series

Location: SPG Gallery, York University, ON, Canada.



Fig 8. It Is And It Is Not Series

Medium: Installation

Material: Mylar and Foam

Size: H 85" X W 115"



Fig 8-8B. *It Is And It Is Not* Series

Medium: Installation

Material: Mylar and Foam

Size: Wall Piece.



Fig 12. Studio: Goldfarb Centre for Fine Arts, York University, North York, ON, Canada.



Fig 13. Studio: Goldfarb Centre for Fine Arts, York University, North York, ON, Canada.

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